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Reagan Nominates Walters To Be Ambassador to U.N.

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President Reagan yesterday named retired lieutenant general Vernon A. Walters, a former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department's chief diplomatic troubleshooter since 1981, to succeed Jeane J. Kirkpatrick as ambassador to the United Nations.

The nomination had been expected since last week when Kirkpatrick announced her resignation. If confirmed by the Senate, Walters would emerge from the shadowy world of intelligence and secret diplomatic missions into the limelight of public diplomacy for the first time in his 44 years of intermittent

government service. Walters, 68, has undertaken missions for presidents of both parties. But his strong anticommunist views and wide-ranging contacts with foreign military leaders, particularly in Latin America and Africa, have made him a favorite of conservative Republican administrations.

Thus, his outlook on global affairs strongly resembles that of Kirkpatrick, who was well-liked by conservatives for seeking a tough U.S. response to leftist insurgency in Third World areas such as Latin America. Kirkpatrick is known to have endorsed Walters' selection. And, when reporters yesterday asked his opinion of her performance at the United Nations, Walters replied, "I

think she's done a fantastic job If I could do half as well, I would be well-pleased."

However, administration sources said it is unlikely that Walters will function like Kirkpatrick, who had considerable influence with Reagan and who seemed at times to be an independent in the Cabinet, frequently at odds with moderates such as Secretary of State George P. Shultz.

Shultz was the leading advocate of giving the U.N. post to Walters, who, as ambassador-at-large, has been a Shultz subordinate and is regarded as loyal to the secretary's policies. Shultz also had argued for dropping the U.N. ambassador's Cabinet status so as to bring the post under

State Department control. But even though the secretary lost that battle, Walters hinted yesterday that he expects to take his lead from Shultz.

"I do not intend to be just a messenger boy," he said in a brief appearance before reporters. "But I do not intend to make difficulties for the policymakers of the United States."

Walters first drew attention as a gifted linguist whose mastery of eight languages caused five presidents and many other important officials to use him as an interpreter in meetings with foreign leaders. One of his closest relationships was with Richard M. Nixon, whom he accompanied to Caracas in 1958, when the then-vice president was besieged by a mob.

Nixon appointed Walters deputy CIA director in May 1972, and a month later Walters became embroiled in the Watergate controversy. At the request of H.R. (Bob) Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, Walters tried to wave the Federal Bureau of Investigation off the Watergate case by telling FBI Director L. Patrick Gray that continued investigation might expose CIA operations in Mexico.

A few days later, after looking into the matter, Walters told White House counsel John W. Dean III that the Watergate investigation posed no danger to CIA activities. Walters later wrote in his memoirs, "Silent Missions": "It simply did not occur to me that the chief of staff to the president might be asking me to do something that was illegal or wrong."

In 1964, when the Brazilian army overthrew the civilian government, leftists in Brazil charged that Walters, then the military attache at the U.S. Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, had encouraged the coup. Walters denied the charge, and no evidence has been offered to support it.

Later, while military attache in Paris in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he arranged secret negotiations between then-national security affairs adviser Henry A. Kissinger and North Vietnamese diplomats.

Early in the Reagan administration, Walters made a secret trip to Cuba to explore the possibility of improved relations with President Fidel Castro. Last year, after rumors that supporters of the rightist Salvadoran political leader Roberto D'Aubuisson were plotting to murder

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U.S. Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, Walters was sent to El Salvador with a stern warning for D'Aubuisson.

Walters estimated yesterday that in the last four years his missions have taken him "more than a million miles" to roughly 100 countries. He said it was incorrect to call them "secret missions" and added, "I just haven't sought publicity. Sometimes that's frustrating, because I'm not a modest man."

It is not known when the Senate will take up Walters' nomination. Walters noted yesterday that the Senate already has confirmed him five times: three times when he was promoted as an Army general and when he took the CIA and ambassador-at-large jobs.



Vernon A. Walters is facing the limelight after 44 years of sporadic government service.